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TAGS: PREL MARR PARM KU

SUBJECT: KUWAIT SCENESETTER FOR MARCH 10 GULF SECURITY  
DIALOGUE

REF: A. KUWAIT 0207  
IB. KUWAIT 0205  
IC. KUWAIT 0159  
ID. KUWAIT 0148  
IE. KUWAIT 0128  
IF. KUWAIT 0090  
IG. KUWAIT 0047  
IH. 07 KUWAIT 0905

Classified By: CDA Misenheimer for reason 1.4 (d)

I1. (S/NF) Summary: The third round of the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) will convene on March 10, capping a banner year for high-level visits to Kuwait, to include POTUS' visit in January. The GOK has expressed commitment to the GSD, but it will need to address shortcomings in a number of areas during these discussions. On Iraq, Kuwait continues to provide indispensable logistical and physical support for our military efforts. However, Kuwait has not sent an Ambassador to Baghdad, continues to say it cannot currently support Iraqi debt forgiveness or a reduction in UNCC payments, and has disbursed less than USD 21 million of its pledged USD 575 million in reconstruction aid. On Iran, Kuwait objects to Tehran's nuclear program on environmental grounds, but will not likely support stronger sanctions after last December's NIE. Kuwait's counterterrorism legislation remains weak, and it has not implemented an effective monitoring program for former Guantanamo detainees. After initial progress, CEIP is stalled: a draft MOU with the USG to establish a Joint Working Group has languished for many months without signature. Finally, the contentious relationship between Cabinet and Parliament makes the passage of any potentially controversial legislation unlikely in the near future. End summary.

Background

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I2. (S/NF) The past year has seen a succession of high-level U.S. visits to Kuwait, including POTUS, FLOTUS, SECSTATE, SECDEF, JCS Chairman ADM Mullen, General Petraeus and a steady stream of Congressional delegations and other civilian and military VIPs. These visits have helped to bolster our bilateral relations, advance U.S. policy and impress upon Kuwait the solidarity of the USG's commitment to the bilateral relationship.

I3. (S/NF) The third round of the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD)

with Kuwait will convene on March 10 in Kuwait City. The National Security Bureau (NSB), which is responsible for coordinating Kuwait's security policy, will chair. We expect the GOK delegation to include:

-- NSB President Shaykh Ahmed Al Fahd Al Sabah  
-- NSB Deputy Director Shaykh Thamer Ali Al Sabah  
-- NSB Manager of International Relations Shaykh Fawaz Al-Meshal Al Sabah  
-- Kuwait Armed Forces Director of Joint Operations BG Ahmed Al-Rahmani  
-- Ministry of Interior BG Abdulrahman Al-Hadhood  
-- MFA Americas Desk Director Ali Al-Sammak  
-- Kuwait State Security Officer LTC Abdullah Al-Kandari, and  
-- Kuwait National Petroleum Corporation Security Manager Fahed Al-Dihani.

¶4. (S/NF) Kuwait's leadership has expressed commitment to the GSD. Some officials have even suggested the discussions be broadened to include a wider range of tactical and strategic issues, such as specific Foreign Military Sales cases. We believe the GSD is not the best venue to conduct such discussions and that a focused approach in line with the original GSD concept remains an appropriate model.

Little Movement on Iraq

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¶5. (S/NF) In recent meetings, General Petraeus and several other senior USG interlocutors have highlighted the importance of Kuwaiti action to normalize its diplomatic relations with Iraq (ref D). Kuwait has hosted a number of senior GOI officials in the past year, including the President, the Vice President, the FM and other Cabinet members. However, Kuwait has not sent its Ambassador to

Baghdad yet, currently citing the lack of an Iraqi Ambassador to Kuwait along with general security concerns (refs B and D). In cooperation with Embassy Baghdad, we have delivered a letter with photo attachments outlining several USG recommendations for short and long-term Kuwaiti Embassy locations in Baghdad.

¶6. (S/NF) We have repeatedly pressed the GOK to allow the immediate resumption of maritime salvage operations in the Khor Abdullah waterway and to reach an agreement with the GOI to finalize the demarcation of its maritime boundary in this area. Embassy Baghdad is developing a draft Iraq-Kuwait MOU to shape the next phase of this effort. Separately, the GOK remains unable - because of contentious domestic politics - to discuss Iraqi debt forgiveness or consider a reduction in Iraqi payments under the UN Compensation Commission. Furthermore, the GOK continues to complain that poor planning and coordination by the GOI prevent the Kuwait Fund from disbursing most of its pledged USD 575 million in reconstruction aid. The GOK refuses entry to Iraqi exports and makes it difficult for Iraqi businessmen to obtain visas. On the positive side, the GOK has agreed to host the Iraq Neighbors Conference on April 22, as well as a Basra Investment fair on March 12.

No Movement on Iran

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¶7. (S/NF) Kuwait continues to couch its concerns about Iran's nuclear program mainly in environmental terms, stressing the proximity of the Bushehr nuclear facility to Kuwait and the potential collateral damage from a military strike or natural disaster. December's NIE further sapped Kuwaiti motivation to support stronger sanctions against Iran. In addition, the Minister of Interior has publicly stated that the GOK will not allow the USG to launch an attack on Iran from Kuwaiti soil (ref H). Kuwait is quite familiar with Iran's use of asymmetric warfare, which it is ill-prepared to counter.

Support for Lebanon

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¶8. (S/NF) The GOK has taken a relatively positive line on Lebanon. In light of Syrian interference in Lebanese internal affairs, the GOK supports postponement of the March Arab League Summit in Damascus, and contributed USD 5 million to cover start-up costs for the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

Lackluster CT Cooperation

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¶9. (S/NF) The GOK does not have adequate CT legislation. In 2007, Kuwait's supreme court, the Court of Cassation, acquitted seven of eight former Guantanamo detainees released to GOK custody. The eighth detainee, contrary to previous GOK statements (ref C), apparently did not die of pulmonary illness, although KSS has offered no further information on his condition or whereabouts. The GOK has yet to demonstrate that it has an effective monitoring system for these former detainees and has not enforced a travel ban against them. In addition, Kuwaiti courts reduced the sentences of several individuals who participated in the Peninsula Lions terrorist attack in Kuwait in January 2005.

¶10. (S/NF) While Kuwait does have a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), its authority is ill-defined and its power is limited. The Departments of Treasury and Justice are sending a team to Kuwait in late March to train the GOK on establishing an effective FIU. The GOK has not yet developed cash declaration requirements for outbound travelers, leaving the door open to illicit cash couriers. The GOK also lacks effective control over several Islamic charities, some of which finance terrorism abroad. The GOK has been slow to fulfill its obligations under UNSCR 1267 to freeze the assets of three of its citizens recently designated as terrorism financiers (ref E).

CEIP Stalled

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¶11. (S/NF) Kuwait's critical energy infrastructure remains highly vulnerable to terrorist attack. CEIP teams have

visited Kuwait three times since 2007 and provided specific recommendations. In response, Kuwait has made some initial, piecemeal upgrades to the physical security of its critical energy infrastructure. However, it has not yet made more important systemic improvements in part due to a lack of interoperability between responsible Kuwaiti agencies (i.e. NSB, MOI, Coast Guard, Ministry of Oil and Kuwait Petroleum Corporation). Significantly, the GOK has not yet designated a lead agency or individual to coordinate its CEIP efforts. In addition, after more than eight months of push-me, pull-you discussions of which agency should lead, the GOK has not yet signed an MOU with the USG to create a bi-lateral Joint Working Group with the aim of implementing the full spectrum of CEIP recommendations.

Continued Parliamentary Intransigence

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¶12. (S/NF) While Parliament passed a raft of economic reform legislation shortly before the POTUS visit in January (ref G), the overall climate between the National Assembly and the GOK remains contentious. Parliament shows a continuing appetite for grilling GOK ministers, and GOK appeasement (in the form of cabinet reshuffles and legislative compromise) has emboldened Kuwait's Islamist MPs. In January, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (the Kuwait Muslim Brotherhood) and the so-called Neo-Islamists won a GOK promise to implement existing gender segregation legislation in private universities in return for the political life of Education Minister Nouriya Al-Sabeh (Kuwait's only remaining female minister) (ref F). The strength and ideology of opposition elements in Parliament, balanced against a government that lacks dynamism, ensure that the GOK will have a difficult time passing any potentially controversial legislation in the near future.

¶13. (S/NF) This problematic political backdrop underscores the importance of the GSD process, which will provide an important opportunity to press for measurable GOK action on shared security aims. Media coverage of the GSD - which will play as an unambiguously positive story line - will also advance U.S. aims by demonstrating continued U.S. commitment to Kuwait's security and thereby strengthening the enduring pro-U.S. sentiment of the Kuwaiti public.

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